

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 30, 2008

The Honorable Barack Obama
President-Elect of the United States
Presidential Transition Headquarters
451 6th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20270

Dear Mr. President-Elect:

As you prepare to take office as the forty-fourth President of the United States, we know that you will face difficult choices as it relates to our nation's defense budget priorities. As you evaluate current acquisition programs and make the tough decisions ahead, we encourage your strong support for the Virginia-class submarine program – a platform of critical importance to our nation's current and long-term defense.

The submarine force plays an absolutely crucial – if most often unrecognized – role in today's military and intelligence gathering operations around the globe. For example, in testimony before the House Armed Services Seapower and Expeditionary Forces Subcommittee last year, Vice Admiral John Donnelly, Commander Naval Submarine Forces, stated that the Navy is “using submarines extensively on the global war on terror” and gathering intelligence “that's briefed at the very highest levels of our government and military.”

The Virginia Class submarine, a multi-mission attack submarine (SSN) and the first the Navy warship designed for the post-Cold War threat environment, is at the forefront of the future of the submarine force. For intelligence gathering, special operations, surveillance, reconnaissance and deterrence, submarines are recognized as the platforms of choice by our Combatant Commanders. With its unprecedented stealth capabilities, firepower, and versatility to conduct both littoral and “blue water” missions, the Virginia Class attack submarine is an unquestioned asset to our naval fleet and national security that can maintain our nation's undersea dominance well into the 21st century.

Despite its unquestioned value to our nation, the submarine force continues to face a challenging future. With much of the current force comprised of boats built in the 1980's, the fleet will be stretched in meeting the demands of our Combatant Commanders as the number of ships being decommissioned outpaces those being delivered. In 2007, for example, the attack submarine force was only able to meet 53 percent of missions requested by those Combatant Commanders – and it will be asked to continue to do more with less as the demand for their unique stealth and intelligence capabilities increases while force levels decline.

Congress took an important and long-awaited step towards securing the future of the submarine force by providing a \$588 million increase in 2007 for advanced procurement of the long lead materials necessary to begin building two Virginia-class submarines per year starting in 2011 – one year ahead of the Navy's previous schedule. And, in 2008,

Congress passed a defense budget that codified the two a year build rate, providing the funding necessary to build two submarines per year between 2011 and 2013.

At a time of great difficulty for a number of defense acquisition programs, the Virginia-class is one of the only major programs with a demonstrated record of innovative cost reduction, schedule acceleration and unparalleled performance. Today, the program is within striking distance of the goal of reducing the cost of each new submarine to \$2 billion (in FY2005 dollars) each by 2012 – an unheard achievement for an acquisition program of its scale. In total, \$4 billion in projected acquisition costs have been saved due to an aggressive cost reduction design effort and efficiencies in the production process that have reduced the construction schedule by 40 percent.

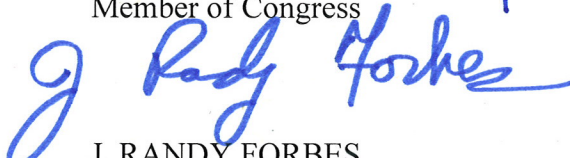
None of this would have been possible without the close partnership between the Navy and its industry partners in the program, General Dynamics Electric Boat and Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding. This team delivered the fifth ship in the program, USS New Hampshire (SSN 778) in August 2008 eight months ahead of schedule, with 3.5 million fewer man-hours and a \$500 million reduction in cost since the lead ship in the class. Further, they expect to deliver the remaining five ships under contract more than eight months earlier than currently scheduled, which will help reduce the overall submarine force level shortfall by getting new boats into operational service sooner. It is this unique relationship that has made the Virginia-class program a shining example of how shipbuilding can, and should, be done.


The naval fleet we build today is the one we will have tomorrow – and we simply do not know what security challenges we will face in the decades ahead. As we make difficult choices about military spending priorities, we cannot lose sight of the need to ensure that our submarine force is able to fulfill our security needs both now and in the future. To this end, we urge your strong support for the continued investment in the Virginia-class submarine program and the continued acceleration of the build rate to two submarines a year.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We look forward to working with you to address the urgent short and long term security challenges our nation faces.

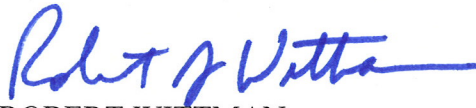
Sincerely,


JOE COURTNEY
Member of Congress


J. RANDY FORBES
Member of Congress


JAMES R. LANGEVIN
Member of Congress


BRAD ELLSWORTH
Member of Congress



ROBERT WITTMAN
Member of Congress



BETTY SUTTON
Member of Congress



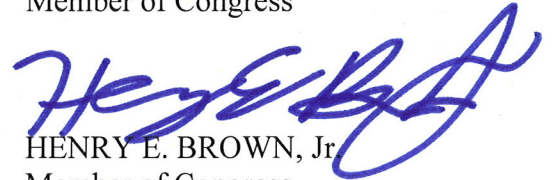
ROSA L. DeLAURO
Member of Congress



ROBERT A. BRADY
Member of Congress



PATRICK J. KENNEDY
Member of Congress



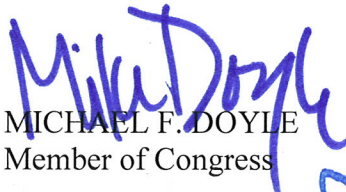
HENRY E. BROWN, Jr.
Member of Congress



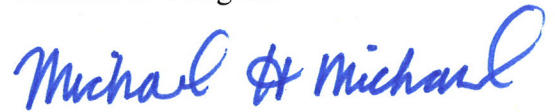
ROBIN HAYES
Member of Congress



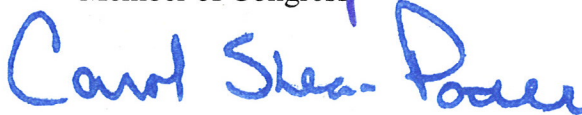
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MICHAEL F. DOYLE
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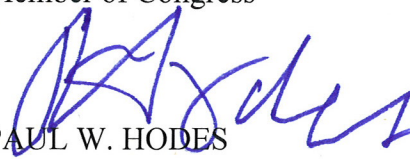
MICHAEL H. MICHAUD
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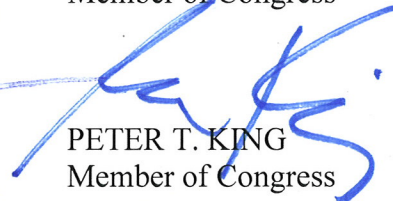
CAROL SHEA-PORTER
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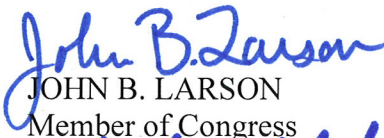
JOHN A. CULBERSON
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PAUL W. HODES
Member of Congress



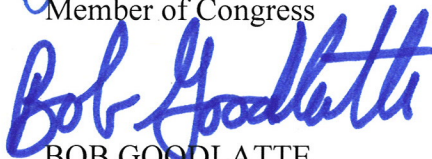
PETER T. KING
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JOHN B. LARSON
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JACK KINGSTON
Member of Congress



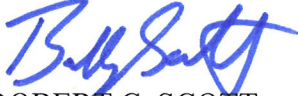
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